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Observation Project  
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### Observable Thoughts

In three days, I have discovered that I know very little about each child in the classroom where I am student teaching. Two weeks ago, I started observing Kashief, a child who was new to the school, every ten minutes throughout the school day. I couldn't follow him to all his subjects due to meetings and special scheduling, so I observed him whenever we were in the classroom together. I learned so much about Kashief by silently observing him for three days that it got me thinking, "What about my other students?" and "What about conversing with each of them?" I know about myself because I am with myself and have been with myself all my life. My students are bringing with them a life outside of school and all of their schooling up to the point they arrived in the classroom. They each have a unique cultural, social, and emotional background. What combinations of these factors lead teachers to various assumptions about their students? What piece of my students' lives am I missing out on that will connect them to life in the classroom or vice versa? How do I judge my students' behaviors and interactions? What time am I taking to really observe and listen? My observation with one child made me rethink my classroom approach. I realize how important it is to observe all I can because it will give me insight to the things I'll never fully know or understand about each child; the things they bring into the classroom from their unique experiences in living.

Kashief struck me as an easy-going but quiet child before my observation. I chose him as the subject of my study because I noticed my daily journal entries about student teaching focused around kids who acted up, have been making significant strides in a subject of personal difficulty, or those who are labeled "high functioning." I noticed that I wrote little and thought little about the kids in the middle; those who rarely spoke, rarely got in trouble, and did their work "on level." Kashief was one who

always escaped my journal entries, yet I constantly wondered about him when I was in the classroom. My cooperating teacher supported my choice, as she, too, was curious about him. She said that he seemed so quiet and reserved, yet she could tell “that something was going on ‘up there’.”

My first day of observing Kashief, I notice I took a lot of notes about his appearance and position of his body. As the days progressed, I discovered a long list of body positions Kashief fits himself into. Kashief, in my opinion, has the most kinesthetic and bodily awareness of anyone else in the classroom. He is always interlacing his fingers or touching different parts of his body in ways that stretch his fingers and joints (like wrapping one arm across his chest and grabbing his back the entire length of a class discussion). He can balance any number of objects of any size and shape using his entire body. I have seen him use his head, hands, knees, arms, and shoulders in elaborate balancing acts as he moves gracefully throughout the room. He chooses new ways of getting himself from one area to the other constantly- walking backwards, turning in circles, high-stepping- without making noise, running into people, or getting tripped up by hazards like desks, chairs, and tables. Whenever he drops something, he quietly picks it up, never uttering an “oh, man,” like the majority of his classmates. He merely smiles as he goes about his tidying and returns to his seat without so much as a squeak of his chair. How he manages to be so quiet and, in my opinion, considerate of his classmates working, is beyond me.

Kashief’s interests outside of the classroom seem to me to lie primarily in sports. He talks about sports, writes about sports, and chooses to play organized sports at recess. This observation made me wonder if Kashief plays any organized sports after school or practices with siblings or neighbors. I also wonder if he would be interested in reading books about sports.

On the subject of reading, Kashief reads at level. He makes his own book choices and spends much of the allocated reading time completing that task. He is rarely distracted from a book, taking a moment or two every few pages to glance around the room at his classmates reading.

Kashief also busies himself in the activity at hand. Whenever directions are given, he is the first to follow them. He looks at the teacher directly, follows the rules, and speaks out of turn only when there is an “injustice,” such as a kid getting wrongfully accused of breaking the rules. He will never turn in the kid who did it; he only defends those (including himself) who didn’t. As for subjects, he furls his eyebrows whenever he is completing a math problem. He shrugs his shoulders when he is speaking and is unsure of himself or how the person he is speaking with will perceive him. When he knows the answer to a question, he sits on his heels and strains to put his arm in the air, flapping his fingers. If he is particularly excited about a topic, he makes straining noises in his throat. On the rare occasion that something slips from his mouth before he is called on by the teacher, he immediately self-corrects by covering his mouth, smiling broadly.

From my observations, I now know Kashief loves to draw, always sits with one leg curled under his body, and that his closest friend in class is Alex. Any free or silent time the class is given, Kashief chooses to draw. Sometimes he uses colored pencils or markers, but most of the time a plain old school-issued pencil is in his hand. He always has a piece of scratch paper handy to sketch on. During any desk time, at least one of Kashief’s legs is folded under his body, but his back and neck are always straight. I don’t know if he is concerned or aware of his posture, but he certainly sits straighter than anyone else in the room. Kashief chats with Alex any chance he gets between activities. Sometimes the two check in with each other briefly when they’re supposed to be concentrating on something else. Kashief always makes an attempt to keep these encounters brief, in my opinion from observations about his rule-following, so as to stick with class rules and not bring on trouble. Kashief and Alex run a drawing club together every Tuesday afternoon. I reason that Alex is Kashief’s chief comrade because Kashief talks to Alex and spends time with him more than he does with any other students in the class.

There is so much going on in Kashief's world, and I feel I have observed and confirmed what my cooperating teacher has long felt. Kashief talks so little, however, I feel I barely know what's going on in his mind. In the coming weeks, I hope to talk with him and engage with him about what I've seen. I am interested in getting him to write about what he thinks, because it seems that talking may be difficult or unwelcome for him. I want to learn what role sports play in his life outside of school. I want to look at his drawings to see if there is a subject trend. If speaking up is a fear, I want to explore strategies that will allow Kashief to share more with the class vocally. I also want to use Kashief as an example when doing physical theatre activities, since he has such an awareness of his body. I also want to see if I can connect Kashief with other students in the classroom that share his interests so he and Alex don't have a "camaraderie monopoly." I will also use my observations with Kashief as a stepping stone to a series of observations of other students in the class. It will be a way for me to recognize who I'm paying attention to, who needs more of my time, and how I can help students bridge their classroom and out-of-school worlds.

## **Observation Project: Kashief**

SUMMARY (what is observed the most often)

- Involved in sports activities at recess and community health
- Tries to be the first in line or at his desk when prompted to do so
- Furls eyebrows when working
- Smiles often
- When seated at desk, usually has one leg folded under self
- Generally speaks in whispers unless addressing teacher or entire class
- Tries to balance objects in unique ways when carrying them

## **25 February 2008**

9:30am (reading): Reading “The Lightning Thief” silently with a straight neck, book angled up from table, on page 227

9:35am: Continuing to read, repositioned self on knees, neck still erect

9:45am (math): Looking at worksheet, one leg folded under self, glances up at others working, smiles at another student, resumes work

10:10am: at a friend’s table with math worksheet, plays “joust” with friend using pencil, has pie fraction tiles out; returns to desk, files math sheet in math folder, returns to fraction tiles

10:16am: takes a walk around the room, returns to fraction tiles, uses right hand to write

10:32am (transition): at desk, one foot folded under self, interlaces fingers and stares ahead when clap-and-respond is given, sits immediately in meeting area when class is called silently (teacher sitting with reading book in hand...didn’t verbally call class to sit)

10:55am (read aloud): made inference in reading that the main character was Catholic, immediately got coat and went to line spot when class dismissed for recess, later asked to get hoodie to wear under coat

RECESS: played with basketball, ran around playground

LUNCH: got three fish sticks, a spoon of steamed veggies, and an apple; didn’t eat one bite; when asked about fish sticks, smiled

12:02pm (immigration): at desk with paper, looked across room, both legs curled under self, holds pencil in hand, went to backpack to file his paper

12:10pm: looks up when classroom door opens, touches face with one or more fingers during discussion, when he spoke out (answering for another student) he immediately put his hand over his mouth

12:14pm: picks at hole in pantleg, gazes around room, brings head up when someone starts speaking

12:17pm: has handwritten notes and page of typed questions on floor in front of him, points at each with opposite hands and looks back and forth between the two as he scans downward

12:27pm: mouth open and poking at lower teeth, sitting cross-legged, asked if “Creole” was in the dictionary

12:37pm (returning from lice check): jogged into room, slit onto floor on his back, headed straight to the dictionary he abandoned before the lice check with Alex

12:53pm: talking with others quietly at his desk, plays with pencil, lounges in chair

COMMUNITY HEALTH: played soccer and hit balls high

1:55pm (transition): smiled when cup of water brought to him, talked quietly with others at his table, has a drawing out

2:05pm (peace time): rolls empty water cup on table, watches it roll, shakes the cup over his face and desk, continues to draw

2:11pm (transition): raised hand and flapped fingers, straining in seat

2:21pm: sits with fingers interlaced

2:31pm (transition): at jobs and pack-up notice he is the first one out of his seat to his job

2:41pm: stands by his desk, pulls shirt down after putting on his backpack, takes off backpack to straighten shirt

## **26 February 2008**

8:25am (math): books and coat placed on his seat, hood up, unfolds math paper and smooths it on the desk, walks with backpack on his head to coat closet

8:27am: walks backward from coat closet to seat with smile on his face

8:41am (math): in his homework he wrote about skateboarding and new moves he learned, plays with pencil and looks at math worksheet the class is going over

9am (meeting/reading): came back from take a break, immediately found a different seat when asked; during reading time he sits on the stage

9:10am: watches a student goofing off, talks with Alex quietly, thumbs through novel, calls to Noel

9:30am (transition): cleans out loose papers from box and tosses them in recycle bin, balances folders and notebooks against head with his reading book in hand while moving to new seat

9:40am: writes name on paper, doesn't talk

10:15am: sorts papers, files notebooks

11am: sitting on heels on carpet, papers scattered in front of him, pencil on the carpet

1:05pm (word study): rubs pencil, sits with one leg under self, looks up at teacher in between words, lifts eyebrows when looking, furls eyebrows when writing, often shrugs and smiles

1:40pm (transition): while opening his backpack he holds papers and notebooks between his knees, playfully kicks his friend and smiles at him when he turns his head

1:47pm (COW set up): balances sets of markers, crayons, and colored pencils; silently picks up pencils that have dropped, quickly shuffles to retrieve students in the drawing club

1:55pm (COW): talks with Alex, leans over desks with legs spread apart

2:47pm (end of day): defended self when called out for making noise, smiled, went to collect his things when called

## **27 February 2008**

8:25am (peace time): one leg folded under self, working on math worksheet, leans forward in seat and keeps back erect

8:40am (math): scoots chair next to neighbor, discussing answers to math problems

8:50am: spoke in clear voice asking a question to the teacher, sits on heels, fingers interlaced under chin

9am (reading buddies): smile on face, sitting with reading buddy and Alex, one leg folded under self

9:10am: with reading buddy, reading quietly

9:22am (transition): talking with Alex quietly, one leg folded under self

9:30am (math): chose carpet spot because he said it was warm, when teacher gave directions to get seated, he was the first at his desk

9:45am: eyebrows furled, looking at paper, every turn of the math packet he makes a crease where the staple is

9:50am: sits with one leg on the chair in front of him, hold book in hands under his desk, glances at his test packet

10am: focused on work

10:25am (reading): both legs folded under self, book on table, leans on elbow, occasionally glances outside

10:35am: started new book, thumbed through book boxes

10:42am: looks up from book, reclines with one foot folded under self, occasionally rests right hand against his cheek or head

10:50am: legs crossed at ankle, one hand on nose or rubbing head, book on end and neck erect

11am (transition): doesn't take coat, takes line spot quickly, talks quietly to friends

12 (peace time): has drawing at his desk, both legs curled under self

12:10pm (math): sits on floor with practice test, scoots and sits on heels, moves to one heel, eventually cross-legged

12:23pm: sitting cross-legged looking at projector, math work in hand

12:30pm (word study): at desk

12:50pm: smiles, messes with eraser, has notebook open, one leg folded under self

1pm: plays with tape dispenser

1:30pm (transition): leans against radiator, one knee is bent and the other leg is straight out

1:40pm: smiling, rushes to line spot during teacher countdown (arriving as one of the first), used a complex sentence to explain an event